

# The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the  
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Editor: DR. PAUL CARUS.

Associates: { E. C. HEGELER.  
MARY CARUS.

VOL. XXII. (No. 6.) JUNE, 1908.

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CHICAGO

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LAO-TZE IN HIS DESOLATION.

By Murata Tanryô.

*Frontispiece to The Open Court.*

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## THE YAHU-TEMPLE IN ELEPHANTINE.

BY THE REV. A. KAMPMEIER.

UNDER this heading Prof. H. Gunkel, formerly of Berlin now of Giessen, publishes a very interesting article in the January number of the *Deutsche Rundschau*. He speaks of the discovery of papyri by Rubensohn last year at Elephantine in upper Egypt. These papyri, written in Aramaic, contain a petition to Bagôhî, governor of Judea, written in the seventeenth year of Darius Nothos (408-407 B.C.). In this petition the priest Yedonya and his colleagues of the Jewish community in Yeb (i. e., Elephantine) beseech the afore-said governor to permit them to rebuild their temple to *Yahu* (this form is used in the papyrus).

They say that their temple had been demolished by Egyptian priests and the governor of Yeb, Waidrang by name, in the fourteenth year of Darius; that this temple had been built even before the Persian invasion; that although Cambyes had destroyed many temples of the Egyptians, he had not destroyed this temple; that three years previously they had written regarding the matter to their master as also to Jochanan, the high-priest in Jerusalem, but had not received any answer. They now repeat the petition and promise to sacrifice to Yahu for the welfare of Bagôhî as also to collect a tax among themselves for him. A sum of money is sent with the petition. They add, that they have also written regarding the matter to Delaya and Shelemya, the sons of Saneballat.

A translation of the full text is given by Professor Gunkel, and an English version may be found on another page of this issue of *The Open Court*. Commenting on this discovery, Professor Gunkel writes substantially as follows:

In the address to the Persian governor they call their God "God of Heaven" (exactly as in Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel). The

Jews in this way strive to make their religion intelligible to the Gentiles and maintain that their God is the same as the "highest" God of other peoples. Especially is this done in dealing with the Persians, who prayed to a "god of heaven." In this way the Jews try to gain advantages for their religion.

Many Jews had settled in Egypt long before this petition, not only at the time of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B. C., when many of their number fled to Egypt, as the Bible tells us, but even before that time, contrary to Deuteronomy xvii. 16, which forbade a return to Egypt, and agreeing with Deut. xxviii. 68, which speaks of Jews selling themselves as bondsmen in Egypt. This would agree with the Aristeeas-letter (which speaks of the origin of the Septuagint) in which the statement is made, that Psammetich (594-89 B. C.) had used Jewish soldiers as allies against the Ethiopians. (Yeb was a fortress and garrison on the confines of Egypt). Isaiah xix also mentions five cities in Egypt speaking the language of Canaan, and an altar to Yahveh in the midst of Egypt, and a pillar to Yahveh at its border, etc.

According to the petition the temple in Yeb must have been of no mean kind. It is built of granite blocks from Syene and cedars from Lebanon. It has five doors and not *one* as the Solomonic, and is not built according to the plan of the latter. Moreover, the Hebrews in Yeb did not heed the command said to be given by Moses, not to worship Yahveh in any other place than the one chosen by Yahveh in Canaan. The silence of the high priest Jochanan in Jerusalem, to whom the matter in Yeb had been presented three years before the writing of the discovered petition, is also significant. Evidently the Judean priesthood did not want the absolute rights of the Jerusalemic temple to be in the least curtailed. It had been the center of the worship of Yahveh in Canaan and in the whole then existing world according to Judean priestly views, since the days of king Josiah. Perhaps the Judean priesthood even saw in the destruction of the temple at Yeb a divine punishment.

Very significant is the remark in the petition that this time the sons of Sanballat have been notified of the matter. As is well known from the book of Nehemiah, Sanballat had formerly been Persian governor in Palestine, and had a son-in-law belonging to the high priest's family in Jerusalem. Since he had a foreign wife he was driven away by Nehemiah in the great cleansing process undertaken by the latter in regard to marriages with strange women, and according to Josephus, became the high priest of the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim. To the sons of that Sanballat, who were



therefore evidently men of importance in Palestine, the Hebrews in Yeb also refer the matter regarding their temple. The Hebrews in Yeb were likewise not so particular and fanatical in regard to marrying strange women as the Judaic priesthood commanded. For according to another document, found at Assuan some time ago, but coming originally also from Elephantine and relating to private business matters of Hebrews in Yeb, intermarriages between Hebrews and Egyptians are clearly proven. Very probably the destruction of the Yahu-temple in Yeb was due to the hatred of the Egyptian priests who saw their religion lose in power because some members became Hebrew converts in consequence of intermarriage.

The Egyptian priests are not called "priests" in the petition, but a contemptuous term is used for them, which Professor Gunkel represents by the German word *Pfaffe*.

This document is a further clear proof that the traditional conception of Israelitic history as we have it throughout the Bible, dating all ecclesiastical and social customs and laws back to Moses, is written entirely from the standpoint of the later *Judaic* priesthood, who strove for the dominating influence among their people. I may add that the petition was successful.